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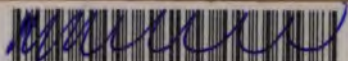


BE THYSELF.

A Discourse.

BY

WILLIAM DENTON.

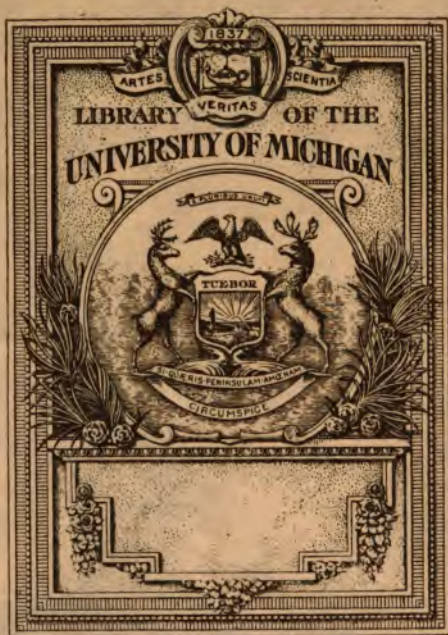


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WILLIAM DENTON.



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BE THYSELF.

WE live in a universe abounding with variety. The heavens present us with systems, suns, stars, planets, comets, meteors, and clouds. Systems differ from systems in shape, suns from suns in size. "One star differeth from another star in glory." One planet is belted, another girt with rings; comets and meteors are as varied as their numbers. Clouds are never twice alike: pile upon pile they lie, with rosy-topped mountain-peaks; skip like silvery sheep across the blue meadow of the sky, or lie like golden islands in a silver sea.

The earth is not less varied than the heavens. Here the mountains lift up their hoary heads in silent majesty, white with the snows of a thousand winters; and there lie the dusky valleys, ten thousand feet below them, where twilight holds continual holiday. The boundless plain stretches before us, a wide expanse without a hillock, an ocean of drifting sand unblessed by a green blade, or a grassy prairie in its virgin green, or clad in flowery beauty; the placid lake, the leaping rill, the dark cañon, the river, rolling forever on, and the ocean girt by low sand-banks or frowning precipices, calm as a frozen

lake, or, waked to wrath by furious storms, howling to the moaning of the winds.

Nor are the organic productions of the earth less varied,—from the cedar that rears its symmetrical head three hundred feet above its roots, to the velvet moss that carpets the ground at its feet. The lichen clings to the boulder, the algæ to the wave-washed rock; the pine's leaves are spines, while a leaf of the talipot palm will cover a company of soldiers. The condor scales with unwearied wing the heights of the Andes; the katydid chirps in the meadow its evening hymn; the whale floats, an island in the ocean; the animalcule explores a drop.

What diversity! No two planets, no two animals, no two things, alike. Not only does the oak differ from the pine, and the pine from the cedar, but no man ever saw two oak-trees alike, nor any two leaves upon an oak. There are no two grains of sand alike: to microscopic eyes they would be as diverse as boulders. To a stranger the sheep in a flock seem all alike; to the shepherd they are as different as the individuals comprising it, and he can call them all by name. Nature never casts two articles out of the same mold: when one is cast, she cracks the mold, and makes a new one for the next, and thus secures endless variety.

Man is no exception to this rule. Look at the variety of races,—the blushing Caucasian, the oblique-eyed Mongolian, the dark-skinned African, the black-haired, beardless American, the dumpy Esquimaux, and the spindle-shanked Australian. Heads differ, eyes differ, fingers differ, all parts differ, in every man from every other man, the world over. That

passing from us which is invisible to all differs from the invisible aura of others, or how could the dog track his master through the crowded street? There are said to be from three to four thousand languages on the globe, from the harsh and guttural Esquimaux to the smooth and liquid Italian. Every individual has, in fact, peculiarities of speech that distinguish him from all others. The voice reveals the person when we have no other clue; and we say that is John, Mary, or Thomas, when the persons speaking are unseen.

This variety that we thus notice in Nature is a continual blessing. Suppose it otherwise. Let all the heavenly bodies be alike in size and brightness, and placed at equal distances, and we should have a celestial checker-board, true to the line, and pretty for one look, but tame forever. Make all the flowers roses, and who would not miss the violet? The rose itself would lose half its beauty for want of contrast with its less fair floral sisters. If all leaves were alike, and all trees after the same pattern, how the dull landscape would fatigue the eye! Make all men like pins in a paper, mold candles in a box, or shot in a barrel, the fat thin, or the thin stout; elongate the short, or stunt the long; give all eyes the same expression; make all noses aquiline or Roman,—and what a desert of faces would surround us! Let it occur to-day, what terrible mistakes would take place before morning! There is not an ugly sinner but would pray for the return of his old face to rescue him from the dead level of humanity.

Minds differ more widely than faces. "Many men, many minds," is a proverb as true as it is old. More

varied than flowers in the garden, leaves in the forest, or stars in the sky, are the minds of mankind. Look into our libraries and see the products of those minds,—books on every conceivable subject, and no two alike even on the same subject.

This difference is seen in boys as soon as the intellect is awake, and manifests itself continually. Here is a little mechanic saving his cents and buying a jack-knife, with which he whittles mimic water-wheels. See him in the brook, his little pants tucked up to his brown knees, while he rejoices, as his wheel spins round, like an angel over a new world. Give him a chance to develop in his own peculiar line, and, like a Watt or a Fulton, he will yoke new steeds to the car of progress, and drive on the world at a diviner speed.

Another little fellow is drawing horses on the barn-door with chalk, or making little dogs out of dough in the kitchen. An artist is he in the germ; full blossomed and fruited, the business of his thinking soul and obedient hand shall be to embody the creations of his genius, that shall bless the world for long centuries after he has gone to more than realize his most glorious conceptions in a higher school of art.

Here is a born orator; mounted on a stump, he harangues the village boys. Proud ships may sail, they attract him not; wheels may spin, what cares he? Could he enchain an audience by his eloquence, earth has no greater blessing, heaven itself could grant no more. To this he devotes himself; his soul leads, he obediently follows, till multitudes hang

breathless upon his words, while he talks as a spring leaps from the mountain-side.

This farmer cares more for his cattle than a monarch for his crown. Spring has driven winter from the land, the birds are singing, and he rejoices as he drives his "jocund team a-field." Nothing could induce him to leave these incense-breathing fields for the din and dust of the city; but the merchant despises the dull round of the farmer, and is never happy but in the crowded mart,—a busy man among busy men.

It is well that it should be so. Were all to become merchants, the stock would soon be spent; the river of commerce would dry up, for the rills of production would cease to flow. Were all producers, goods would accumulate as water does in lakes, and there would be no rivers to distribute the surplus to the needy lands. If all were poets, painters, or orators, bread and butter would be sadly deficient; and if all were plain, prosy farmers, how much that makes life joyous we should lose!

As men's intellectual endowments differ, so do their moral faculties and religious sentiments. One is a born sceptic; he must see, hear, feel, and is hardly satisfied without tasting and smelling, what is marvellous, in order to give it credence. He may desire to believe; but the arms of his faith are so short that they can not reach the distant object. Another believes at once: it is only necessary to present the statement, and he swallows it in a moment, though "gross as a mountain." He reads that the whale swallowed Jonah, and he lived three days in his belly; if he had read that Jonah swallowed the

whale, he would swallow both, and make no bones about either. He has no need to pray,—

“Stretch our faith’s capacity wider and yet wider still.”

The door of his soul is wide enough to take in all company; no more to be reasonably praised for the width of his spiritual gullet, than the sceptic blamed for the narrowness of his.

One is firm as a mountain: he feels like Fitz James when he exclaimed, —

“Come one, come all! This rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I.”

Another is pliant as the wheat-stalk, that waves in the June breeze.

This man is spiritual; every breath that he draws is redolent of heaven; he mounts as naturally as the freed bird, and carols in the sky; that man gravitates to the earth like a thunder-cloud big with a shower.

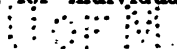
The arms of the benevolent would all mankind embrace. If he were made of gold, his sympathy would lead him to give himself away for the benefit of mankind. Some such give away all that they have, and more than they have; while the economical man’s purse-strings are twined around his heart, sometimes with a hard-to-be-loosed knot in them, and he thinks ten times before he gives once.

If all were credulous as some, the world would feed on lies, and dire would be the consequence. If all were sceptical as others, new truths and strange facts might stand knocking at the world’s heart for

centuries before they gained admission. If all were firm and unyielding, progress would either be impossible or very slow; and, if all were equally pliant, revolutions would be as plentiful as showers in spring, and peace and stability would be at an end. If all were spiritual as Swedenborg in his later days, corn and potatoes would be sadly deficient; and if all were "of the earth, earthy," we should be no better than the savage in the wild.

There may be too wide deviations from a normal standard morally, as there are intellectually; for some are born morally asquint, as others are physically, — deviations that require careful culture and training to overcome. But men as naturally differ in their moral natures as they do in their physical constitutions, and the difference thus existing is of the greatest value to the race. One's religion is like the sun, fervid and intense; another's like the moon, calm and beautiful; and another's like the stars, bright and saint-like; yet all lovely as the varied flowers of the meadow, or the tints of the evening sky.

Hence the importance of the exhortation of my text, — BE THYSELF. There is no originality, no complete manhood, without it. It is the highest prerogative of the animal kingdom, the crowning glory of humanity. Among the coral polyps, at the base of the animal kingdom, we have millions of animals united in one community; what is eaten by one is as if eaten by all; and the will of the individual is lost in that of the group, harmoniously forming their stony structures at the sea-bottom. Among the mollusks, countless multitudes lie in one oozy bed, with little scope, as there is little inclination, for individual



action. Among the fishes there is more scope; but, living in shoals, the will of one is lost in that of the many. Among the birds a few leaders control the flock. Beasts possess more independence; but the strongest horse leads the band as it sweeps over the prairie, and the old male buffalo decides the course of the entire herd. Ascending to man, there is more individuality, and the most among the most highly developed.

Even the savage is an individual who comes into direct communication with Nature for himself. His parents say, "Shift for yourself," and Nature says the same. He learns where the fish hide, and he spears them; he watches the beaver, and traps it, that he may clothe himself with its skin. He knows the ridge on which the chestnut grows; and, when the leaves fall, he makes for the winter a secret hoard. He builds his own tent, supplies his fire, communes with Nature, and forms ideas of the world in which he finds himself. But he must be obedient to his chief, even to death; and his individuality is sacrificed continually. But here is the philosopher in whom humanity blossoms, and brings forth fruit. In him we see the highest exemplification of self-hood. In him Nature's great endeavor is fulfilled, her work of the ages is completed. Reason sits on the throne; and the lawless propensities are subject to her sway. He reads, hears, investigates; and what his judgment decides upon, that he does, and hears the continual plaudit of a good conscience, saying, "Well done!"

The benefits that flow from the exercise of this self-hood are inconceivable. Among men who practice it are Emerson, the most original mind on this

continent, and whose private life is pure as his intellect is clear; Garrison, whose manliness no force could bend, and whose love for the bondman was only equaled by a fearless denunciation of his oppressors; in science, Lyell, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Draper, independent free-thinkers, who are delivering the world from ignorance, enlarging the domain of thought, and breaking the bonds of priestly bigotry and intolerance. On the other side are the tools of Popish superstition, who dare hardly call their souls their own; with whom the word of a priest is potent as a law of God; who kneel, and swallow the God baked but yesterday by the cook, and dare not open their shutters to let in one ray of heaven's pure light; the slaves of Episcopal domination, whose priests swear never to be wiser than the Thirty-nine Articles, and who must perjure themselves if they ever step beyond the narrow, creed-made pale that the first step of an infant mind would almost overstride; and, along with these, the millions of abject ecclesiastical subjects, whose spiritual bondage is their pride, and who tremble when they hear a free thought, lest the heavens fall, or the earth gape, and swallow both speaker and hearers.

The world's heroes in poetry, philosophy, mechanics, and reform, have been heroic by virtue of their selfhood. Leave this out of the composition of a man, and you have, in poetry, a verse-wright who never dared to write an original line; in philosophy, a peddler of defunct ideas; and in war, a poltroon. What made Homer the prince of song, and enabled the old "blind man of Chio" to chant a strain which the hills of Greece echoed for centuries, still heard

across the wild ocean, and amid the din and roar of this nineteenth century? He wrote in his own inimitable style the beautiful thoughts that crowded into his brain: from the heaven of his own creation, he poured down those melodies which a busy world on tiptoe stands to hear.

Who was Shakspeare's model? Whence did he draw the supplies of which millions have drunk and been refreshed? With no broken pitcher did he go to another's well, but drew from the exhaustless fountain of his own soul. He stands to-day like a granite mountain, whose head is lost in the clouds, and whose culminating point no traveler has reached: as men ascend, untrodden heights lie still above them. Had he been a mere imitator, the molehill of his production would have been long since trodden to the dead level of the plain.

How did Bunyan write his "Pilgrim's Progress"? As the brook babbles, taking no counsel of other brooks, but telling its own story in its own way; and, in spite of its many absurdities, the tinker's book will live for centuries. Copernicus and Galileo, taking counsel of their own souls, heeding not the monkish fable-mongers who believed the world to be flat as a table, and the stars little shining points, boldly marched into the untrodden realm, explored its seas of worlds, and came back laden with glorious truths.

Columbus, advising with no Past, old and decrepit, who had bounded the world, and inscribed on its boundary, "No more beyond," launched his bark to cross the unknown ocean; and for weary weeks and months sailed steadily on, on,—the cloudy sky above, the inky sea around,—spite of the frowns, tears, and

entreaties of the cowards who accompanied him, till a new world, like a radiant maiden, leaped into his arms, and blessed him for his manliness. We are here to-day because Columbus dared to be himself.

It was this self-hood that made Raphael the prince of painters, and Napoleon of warriors. "He does not fight according to the rule," said the European fogies. No; but he had a rule of his own to fight by, and thus he conquered. In Watts, it gave us the steam-engine, with its hundred hands and its restless soul; and in Fulton, the boat that heeds not wind or tide, whose steam-arm paddles day and night, and never tires. By it, Socrates climbed the heights of philosophy, from which it was but a step to the heaven into which he entered.

[Mere imitators in art never scale the heights; but, placing their feet in the prints left by former travelers, they tire themselves out with a step that is unnatural to them, and faint and die by the way, leaving no sign behind that they have ever been. In life's battle, they never make heroes, but wearing another man's armor which never fits them, and wielding a weapon never made for them, they accomplish little, and fall an easy prey to the enemy.]

Of the hundreds who have imitated Shakspeare, how many live in remembrance? They have gone like the smoke of the Indian wigwam from our land, while he shines on like a star. Books written by these imitators are mere repositories of twaddle, mountains of chaff, great in bulk, but small in nutriment for the hungry soul. A bonfire of them would give more light to the world than they can give in any other way. Most of our theological works are

of this class,—embalmed hosts of dead men's foolish thoughts: a library of them is a catacomb or a mummy pit; how useless to look for light or life in them! Men throw overboard their own thoughts, richer than pearls, and load their barks with cast-off, water-worn shells of conservatism.

Books written by thinkers—men who thought and dared to express their thoughts—are always worth reading. I care not whether their authors were Atheists or Methodists, Heathen or Mohammedan; the life's blood of the author circulates through them, and in reading you feel its pulsations. But books written by men who never saw through their own eyes, who never put out their hands, and felt the world for themselves, nor took one manly step, are the faintest echoes from the distant hills, compared with the heaven-shaking thunder that produced them.

Selfhood is as necessary in religion as in art, science, and literature. The world has been cursed for centuries by men who have sought to shape the religious element in all after the same model. Placing the soul of man in the crucible of sect, it has been melted down, and poured into some creed-made mould: its beauty marred, its original proportions destroyed, it stands a monument of man's folly, a warning to all, and speaks in loudest tones the language of my text, Brother, sister, BE THYSELF!

All great religious reformers have acted more or less on this principle. The more fully they have carried it out, all other things being equal, the wider has been their sphere of influence, and the more good they have accomplished. What enabled Moses

to rise above the multitude, like a mountain in the midst of a vast plain, so high, that, at the distance of thirty-five hundred years, he stands out still in bold relief against the horizon? What magic was there in his name, that Oblivion swallowed it not with the millions that have disappeared in his never-to-be-satisfied maw? Snapping the fetters with which the priests of Egypt sought to bind his soul, he listened to the promptings of his heart as it taught him a better religion than he had ever before heard; and he hesitated not to obey its requirements. Leaving behind him the enchantments of Egypt, and the pleasure of Pharaoh's court, he became a wanderer in the desert,—an excellent place for a man to commune with himself. Thence he came, and stamped his soul upon the Jewish nation.

He dared to think for himself on religious matters, to face the great universe and question it; and with a rare originality he taught his countrymen a religion—the answer, as he believed, to his questions—far in advance of its predecessors. But every Jew had just as much right to question for himself and cherish the answer as he; but this Moses would by no means allow: the answer to him must be the answer for all. Hear him! "If thou wilt obey the statutes and commandments that I command thee this day, then blessed shalt thou be in the city and in the field; blessed in thy going-out, and blessed in thy coming-in; blessed in thy basket and in thy store. But, if thou wilt not obey them, cursed shalt thou be in the city and in the field; cursed in thy going-out and coming-in, in thy basket and in thy store." Liberty, spontaneity, selfhood, all must be sacrificed to rigid conformity. The

Jew must be a Mosean, or destruction awaited him. Moses regards the seventh day as holier than all others, and consecrates it to rest for all generations; and the independent Israelite, who gathered sticks upon that day, is stoned to death. Moses thought an angry God could be appeased by burning sheep, oxen, and doves; and the man who has advanced beyond this, who does not believe that God can be pleased with the smell of roasting beasts, must kill and roast his cattle notwithstanding; for Moses speaks, and will be obeyed.

You tell me that Moses received his commandments from God; yes, from the God that is in you and me, and in the same way that we receive ours. He talked with him as we talk with him when we converse with our brother; and he saw him as we see him in the starry sky, or the grassy spear at our feet pointing heavenward. Man three thousand years ago was no nearer to God than we are to day; and the New-England thinker can see God on Mount Katahdin as well as Moses did on Sinai.

Moses thus became the model man for the whole Jewish nation. Every child was taught, that just in proportion as he became like Moses, was he a true man, and sure of God's blessing; as far as he fell short of this, so far had he departed from the right, and was subject to a curse.

After the death of Moses, he was elevated by priest and Levite, sabbath after sabbath, and feast after feast; his holy law unrolled, and weekly read to the assembled multitude. Moses was king, the children of Israel his subjects. Moses was the die, and the Jews the coin, stamped by the repeated blows of their priests with his image and superscription. To be like Moses

was the highest ambition of the noblest and best; greater than he could no man be; to be wiser was impossible, and to dream of being better was blasphemous.

Thus crept the nation snail-like through the dull centuries; an oppressive ritual upon their backs like a mountain of lead, and Moses before them, a dark cloud shutting out the blue sky from their wistful gaze.

But Nazareth produced a man who refused to bow any longer to the God, Moses, that had been set up. "One man dared to be true to what is in you and me." In an age of slaves he was free; in an age of cowards he was a hero. While the whole nation was crawling in the dust, Jesus stood upon his feet, and allowed his manhood to speak. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time (that is, by Moses and the Moseans), An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." "Again: ye have heard it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; but I say unto you, Swear not at all. Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." We find him saying, in opposition to old Jewdom, "Why judge ye not of yourselves what is right?" He proclaimed himself Lord of the sabbath, as every sensible man is, and boldly set at defiance all who attempted to fetter his soul. What a consternation was there among the scribes and Pharisees, the soul-mongers of Judæa! "Have you heard that mechanic of Galilee, who is traveling about the country preaching heresy? He addressed a rabble the other day, when he made him-

self superior to Moses, and set at naught the law given by God himself on Mount Sinai. I understand that he has been saying, Why judge ye not what is right yourselves? thus making men their own lawgivers, and taking away the necessity for our services. He is a bold blasphemer, whose mouth must be stopped; away with him, away with him, crucify him, crucify him, he is not fit to live!" The multitude echo the cry, "Away with him, crucify him!" and so they did; and doubtless thought there was an end of his doctrine, and their craft was forever safe. Never did men make a greater mistake. Bury a truth and it is a seed; it springs up, grows, and bears fruit a thousand-fold. Kill a reformer, and his ghost does a hundred times more than the man could ever have done if alive. The doctrine of Jesus could not be killed, and his death seemed to give it life; it spread far and wide; mounted the hills, crossed the valleys, was wafted over the seas; it mounted the throne of the Cæsars, and conquered the conquerors of the world. Now the despised Nazarene, the young reformer of Galilee, has become the esteemed Saviour. While he lived, he was no better than the publicans and sinners with whom he associated; he had a devil, and was mad; he was a pestilent fellow, whom no Jewish aristocrat would be seen in company with for the world. But now he is a good man, a great man, a prophet; nay, a greater prophet than Elias himself, then the greatest and best man that ever lived; the Son of God, yea, the only-begotten Son of God; and lastly, God Almighty from heaven! Men were not satisfied until they had unseated the Omnipotent, and set the man Jesus upon his throne. This is the way the world serves reform-

ers; there is nothing too vile to say about them while they are alive, and nothing too good when they are dead, and the world has accepted their doctrine.

Moses was now dethroned, and Jesus made king; henceforth all must be his obedient subjects. Moses was knocked unceremoniously off the pedestal, Jesus placed thereon, and made the model for the whole human race. "Looking unto Jesus" now becomes the duty of all. The path of life bears the impressions of his feet, and it is our duty, not to make our own impressions, but walk implicitly in his; for "he has left us an example, that we should tread in his steps."

Thus have men destroyed one idol and set up another; and the business of our modern scribes and pharisees is to induce people to worship it. In the name of Jesus the freeman, souls are robbed of their birth-right, and the most terrible threatenings denounced against those who, like him, dare to be themselves. In the name of humanity, I protest against this. Jesus our helper, our friend, our teacher, but never our master or tyrant, who holds the lash of future torment over the trembling captive.

Supposing the Jesus of the New Testament to be the veritable God-man, who lived and died that we might live, his example is not such as it would be well for mankind generally to follow. Could each man be a Jesus, it would still be infinitely better to be himself. Looking at his character, as drawn by his four biographers, let us see what would be the consequence of a universal attempt to imitate the example of Jesus.

He lived to be above thirty years of age, yet never was married, never had a wife to call him husband,

nor a child, father. On one occasion he said, "There are some eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men, and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." Paul, who seems to have regarded Jesus as a perfect example, never was married, and he advised others to imitate him, as he did his master. Suppose men universally were to shape themselves thus after this model, would not the consequence be most disastrous? The whole world a Shaker community, and in less than a hundred and fifty years a wilderness of wild beasts without a human inhabitant.

According to Mark, Jesus worked at the trade of a carpenter. At the age of thirty he abandoned his business and went out to preach the Gospel. Walking by the sea of Galilee he found Simon and Andrew, James and John, fishing; he called them, saying, "I will make you fishers of men;" they left their fishes and nets, and followed him. Matthew sat at the receipt of custom; Jesus passed by, and said, "Follow me;" and, strange to say, although a Jew, he left his money-gathering business, and followed Jesus. When he had in this way taken twelve men from their avocations, and they and a multitude were assembled together, he preached to them thus: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than

they? Why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin. Therefore take no thought saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Again he says, "Sell that ye have, and give alms." Suppose that men were to commence imitating Jesus in this respect. The tailor leaves the shopboard and cloth, the blacksmith the hammer and anvil, the farmer the plow, and the weaver the loom; millers cease to grind, and bakers to bake, and each commences to preach; and as they preach, they say, "God has given you life, will he not, also, give you food to sustain that life? Cease working, then, and trust in him. He has given you bodies without any effort of your own; will he not much more clothe those bodies without any labor on your part? Look at the sparrows and the pigeons; they neither sow nor reap, and yet God feeds them. Consider the wild roses; see how beautiful they are, and how well clothed; the purple robe of a king is not equal to theirs, and yet they neither spin nor weave. Therefore take no thought about what you shall eat or wear, but trust in God, who feeds the sparrows and clothes the grass, and it will all be well."

The consequences of generally practicing such unphilosophical doctrine would be starvation and ruin. It might answer well for Jesus and his disciples to do

thus, for others were sowing, reaping, baking, and fishing for them, and supplying their necessities. If it had not been so, their preaching and practice would have by no means corresponded; for they would have discovered that loaves do not grow on bushes, nor clothes on trees, and that though birds may be fed without sowing and reaping, it is otherwise with human beings.

On one occasion, Jesus went into the temple, and found there money changers, and the sellers of oxen, sheep, and doves; and after he had made a scourge of cords he drove them out, poured out the changers' money and overthrew the tables; this, too, after preaching non-resistance to its utmost extent. An imitation of such conduct would hardly be tolerated, nor would its influence be beneficial. His denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees is terrible; they were surely not all bad, all "serpents" and of the "generation of vipers," all "fools and blind;" yet he makes no exceptions, but fulminates his woes against them in the most offensive manner. If they were thus bad, how much would his denunciations do toward reforming them? And among a large class like this, there must have been some noble characters.

He told his disciples in the beginning of his ministry not to preach his doctrines to the Gentiles, and states himself that he preached in parables that others "seeing might not see, and hearing, they might not understand." When the people ask him very reasonably for a sign of his Messiahship, he calls them an "evil and adulterous generation." He makes himself the head, and teaches that all are to be subordinate to him. "One is your master, even Christ;" "I, your

lord and master." If a city would not receive his disciples, nor hear their words, as they wandered round rehearsing the gospel of the Nazarene, when they departed from it they were to shake off the dust of their feet as a testimony against it, and he informs them that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city. He seems to have had some of the feeling that exists in the little souls of our sectarian bigots. Their sect is comprised of the chosen few, to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom. They are not of the world, and they will have the pleasure of seeing the destruction of their enemies, those who would not believe, bow down to, and support their church. The notions of Jesus with regard to property, prayer, and non-resistance, are very far from reasonable; and though he said and did many excellent things, taking the narratives concerning him to be true, still it is evident that he is no model for the race.

And of this the church generally seems to be aware, though professing continually to practice his precepts and live his life. Jesus says, "Lend, hoping for nothing again;" but where are the Christians that do it? Do outsiders demand six per cent, ten per cent, or two per cent a month, if they find any one whose necessities compel him to pay such usurious interest, then Christians do the same; and no difference, in this respect, is observable between them. Jesus said. "Resist not evil, and if any man smite thee on the one cheek, turn the other also;" "Love your enemies." Christians generally pay no more attention to these commands than if they had never been uttered; in fact, every sect has made an artificial Jesus of its own,

generally less fanatical and extravagant, and more fashionable and better suited to the times. We have a Quaker Jesus, who wears a broad-brim, and says "thee," who never enters a "steeple house," and looks upon music and dancing with horror. The Methodist Jesus believes in class-meetings where every one tells his experience; in prayer-meetings where men and women shout and scream as if God was afar off or asleep, and has great faith in John Wesley's sermons and the Methodist discipline. The Episcopal Jesus, unlike the real one, thinks much of forms and ceremonies, loves the tones of a solemn organ, and the dim, religious light that streams through a stained glass window; believes in the thirty-nine articles, and thinks the creed of Athanasius, "which in damning souls is very spacious," one of the best compositions outside of the Bible. The Shaker Jesus believes in "Mother Ann," regards marriage as a mortal sin, thinks all the world Sodom, and Shaker communities so many Zoars to which the righteous Lots have fled from the impending destruction.

This conduct is probably better than it would be to follow literally the example of Jesus, for this, we have seen, would be most disastrous. The obligation of my text is strengthened, then, by our review of the life of Jesus and the conduct of his so-called Church. Man, woman, be thyself, and thou shalt be as great as Jesus, too, or greater than he.

In obedience to this principle, Luther, singlehanded, coped with the banded hosts of Popery, shook the triple-crowned Pope himself, though sitting on the throne of ages, made the Roman hierarchy tremble at the sound of his name, and delivered from priestly

tyranny a host of noble souls. Had he been content to shroud his manhood in the monk's cowl, and keep down the rising aspirations of his soul, we might still have been moping about in the dark night of priestcraft, by the pale light of the stars, nor dreaming of a dawning day, and he, a poor Popish slave, had crept long since to the silent grave.

Had he been more faithful to his soul, walked according to its dictates without looking to the right or the left, we might have been much farther advanced to-day. What a multitude of Lutherans are wearing his cast-off clothes, ragged and thread-bare, fitting no one, in place of their own natural and beautiful apparel!

George Fox was a poor shoemaker in Drayton, Lincolnshire. Feeling the fire of truth burning in his bosom, he went out to warm the cold, dead world with its divine influence; casting down his boots and lasts, he went forth to preach the Gospel. What Gospel? The Gospel of George Fox, and no other. And this poor shoemaker, with no more than an ordinary amount of brain and intelligence, shook every steeple in the land. Bold, fearing nothing when his soul led the way, pre-eminently self-reliant, and ever turning to "the light within," we find him entering the old vaults of gloomy superstition, club in hand, breaking the sectarian images, opening the prison doors, flashing light into the dark corners, and enforcing by precept and example the sentiment of my text. When the priests heard that the "man with the leather breeches" was coming, they left their pulpits and fled; and George mounted the deserted pulpits and distributed to the famished multitude the bread of life. At one time we find him wading through the bogs of Ireland, at another

roaming in the wilds of America. The phlegmatic Hollander is stirred by the indefatigable Drayton shoemaker, nor could the cold prisons of England quench the fire of his zeal. Had all the Quakers been as much themselves as George, the promised millennium had dawned long ere this. This, alas! they never dreamed of being. George was good, great, and useful; and they, to be so, must be like him; the nearer the resemblance the better. He wore a broad-brim, had no collar on his coat, said "thou" and "thee;" and every genuine Quaker does the same to this day; and should he depart from the faith, he is soon told "Thee is not following Friends' rule." When George went into a church, he kept on his hat, to show that he had no faith in "holy houses;" the Quakers, imitating their model man, wear hats in their own meeting-houses, which no one regards as holy, and that to the detriment of their health. Unfortunately George could not sing, and had a small organ of ideality, so that he had no taste for pictures, and little or none for the fine arts generally. Henceforth, every Quaker must be dumb; music is a sin, and paintings and sculpture awful waste of time and labor. Friends' meeting-houses are built like barns, and their worship is so dead and monotonous that the young gladly escape from it to something more attractive. The spirit may move one Friend to sing as much as it does another to preach; but all singing spirits are "demons," and must be exorcised. In short, every Quaker must be a Fox, whereas to be a man, he must needs be himself.

John Wesley was somewhat manly; and his obedience to himself, despite of ecclesiastical laws, made him a reformer; but when he said to the members of

his church, "It is your business to obey our rules, and not to mend them," he evidently did not intend others to be as noble as he had been.

If thou wouldst be a man, bend at the shrine of no mortal; walk in no pathway because others tread it; be thy cwn leader, thy own sect; when all are so, then will come the true church. Who was Wesley, that thou shouldst be a Wesleyan? or Luther, that thou shouldst be a Lutheran? or Christ that thou shouldst be a Christian? all men; art thou not equally so? When the priest threatens thee with damnation, and would load thee with his gyves to secure thy soul's salvation, say, "Hands off, sir! I am, also, a man! Rather let me be lost, being a free man, than be saved to be an eternal slave!"

Sects are engines that crush the soul; priests direct them! Keep out of their power. They are sand-pits where ignorant or interested men pretend to dig treasures; keep from their brink; once enter, thou mayest lose the light of day. They are man-traps set on "holy ground;" beware of them; let not thy feet wander on their domain.

But, says an objector, some men's sense of right is very defective, and when they think they are doing right they are really doing wrong. I most willingly grant it; but what then? Shall we tell the man that he must do what he thinks is wrong? or shall we tell him that we are right and he must bow to our authority? This would make the man a slave, and that could never be right. If a man should be so blinded as to conscientiously believe right to be wrong and wrong to be right, I should still say to him, "Do what you believe to be right, but the consequence of

your ignorance will fall upon your head." Whether men sin ignorantly or willfully, they suffer, and this suffering tends to make them wiser continually,—tends to bring their sense of right side by side with Nature's actual right.

But, says another, must man discard all models, cast aside all examples, refuse all guides? Destruction would assuredly be his fate. There is no necessity for this; all models, all examples, all guides are useful to enable us to form our own. A man's model must be in his own soul, all others with which he is conversant assisting in forming it.

Ever there floats before the real
The bright, the beautiful ideal.
And as, to guide the sculptor's hand,
The living forms of beauty stand,
Till from the rough-hewn marble starts
A thing of grace in all its parts,
So ever stand before the soul
A model, beautiful and whole :
The perfect man that we should be,
Erect in stern integrity.
Keep this, oh soul, before thy sight,
And form the inward man aright.

Be true to this model to-day, and to-morrow it is fairer and more beautiful and perfect, always advancing as we advance, and ever before and above us beckoning us on. All we read, hear, and learn helps us in the formation of this true self that must be our model; hence we must disdain no advice, even from a child. We all have much to learn. Moses, Jesus, and Joseph Smith may teach us something; let us thankfully receive all they can give. But let no

man take us off our feet; let the officious help of none prevent us from exercising our faculties and unfolding ourselves in accordance with our own law.

Religious imitators, like all others, fall short of their original, and copy its defects, rather than its excellences. The Pharisees imitated the sectarian pride, the narrow-souled bigotry of Moses, who could see no virtue outside of the tents of Israel, rather than the wisdom that dictated sound laws, and the meekness that is said to have characterized their model man. Of the million imitators of Jesus, we have many that can denounce with his vehemence, proclaim damnation to all unbelievers, and speak of outsiders as "dogs;" but how few imitate his manliness, his contempt of riches, his active benevolence and unswerving adherence to right? Of the thousands of Quakers who imitate the little, and in some cases ridiculous, peculiarities of George Fox, where will you find the man as bold and self-reliant as he, daring to utter his thoughts though they differ from those of every living mortal?

Absurd imitation of the past has characterized the masses in all ages. The worship of the Greek and Roman deities continued after all faith in them was gone. Altars smoked and priests officiated in the temples long after the gods had departed; for the dead absurdities of the Past ruled the living Present; and even the philosophers did not possess sufficient self-hood to throw off their allegiance to the defunct tyrants. In our own time, the foolish dictates of fashion are scrupulously obeyed by millions who know no higher law; and multitudes of intelligent

men and women become the mere playthings with which she sports at her pleasure.

Instead of one fashion-monger dictating to the world, how much better would it be if all developed their natural taste and love of the beautiful, and dressed accordingly. How much we lose from the stupid folly of those who allow the taste of one, or it may be the lack of taste in one, to govern and mold the whole.

All who take the privilege of being themselves should be equally willing to give the same privilege, and not seek to impose their conditions upon others. The water is very well for a fish to live in, but a poor place for a bird; and though grass makes a good dinner for a horse, a lion would soon starve on it. The road I travel may suit me, but what right have I, when others are unwilling to go the same way, to knock them down and drag them into it? Every planet may revolve on his own orbit, so it comes into collision with no other; and there is room in the wide universe even for the eccentric comet.

Many reformers decry and despise those who are operating in other fields. Their pet reform is the one upon which the world hangs, or the central sun around which the universe revolves. All others are fragmentary, theirs integral. Men advocate one reform, read about it, hear every one talk about it where they lecture, until it assumes a mountain magnitude and shuts out all else from their gaze. The Temperance Reformer says nothing can be done to elevate and bless the masses till they are made sober, for drunkenness is the parent of crime and misery. Let all become temperate and the day of the Lord is

at hand; and he is astonished that all reformers do not lend their aid to the great work until it is accomplished. The Antislavery Reformer assures us that slavery is the curse of curses; the canker-worm that is eating out the nation's heart; the sum of all villainies; a fire burning to the lowest hell. Hence the Antislavery Reform is the most important; all others are comprehended in it, and he who does not advocate it is recreant to truth and duty.

The Land Reformer is certain that his reform underlies all others,—the soil must be the foundation. Let the land be equally divided, or every man have possession of what he can cultivate, and poverty, and the vice and misery consequent upon it, will flee, and the golden age return. Slavery could not exist, intemperance would be no more, and the voice of rejoicing would be heard through all the land.

"This reform all should labor for," says he. "Hold!" says the advocate of Woman's Rights. "Men are what their mothers make them, and they make bad laws because women who mold them are robbed of their rights, and hold a degrading position in the world. Give woman her true position, educate her for her high destiny, and every reform will follow, as spring the flowers when summer warms the soil."

All these are useful, all necessary; but no one or two reforms include the whole. Make the world sober to-morrow, licentiousness, tyranny, war, and ignorance would still abound; destroy slavery, and an army of evils would still remain for the reformer to combat.

"Find thy work and do it," my brother, my sister.

The business of one is to enter the untrodden wild, axe in hand, and with sturdy strokes bring to the ground the giant trees; of another, to grub up the bushes and pile the brush for burning; the work of a third, to turn up the virgin soil to the sun's bright eye, while others follow to scatter broadcast the good seed, attend the growing crops, and gather in the glorious harvest. All are necessary; none can say, "I have no need of thee;" for the final result can only be obtained by the diversified labor of all.

Heed not the teachers who tell thee to deny and crucify thyself. Thou art thy own law, thy own Bible, thy own model. There are no Scriptures so sacred as those written in thy soul; read them carefully, and obey them faithfully, ever seeking for new light to scan aright their pages, from the world around thee, transcribed in books, or engraven upon the ever-living page of Nature herself. So shalt thou develop into a noble, sound, whole-souled being, happy in thyself, and diffusing happiness, as the rose its fragrance, to all around.

Be thyself; a nobler gospel
 Never preached the Nazarene;
 Be thyself; 'tis holy Scripture,
 Though no Bible lids between.

Dare to shape the thought in language
 That is lying in thy brain;
 Dare to launch it, banners flying,
 On the bosom of the main.

What though pirate knaves surround thee;
 Nail thy colors to the mast;
 Flinch not, flee not; boldly sailing,
 Thou shalt gain the port at last.

Be no parrot, idly prating
Thoughts the spirit never knew;
Be a prophet of the God-sent,
Telling all thy message true.

True, the coward world will scorn thee,
Friends may fail, and fiends will frown;
Heaven itself grow dark above thee,
Gods in anger thence look down.

Heed not; there's a world more potent
Carried in thy manly heart;
Be thyself, and do thy duty;
It will always take thy part.

If the God within say, "Well done!"
What are other gods to thee?
Hell's his frown; but where his smile is,
There is heaven for the free.

U. S. N.

